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ABSTRACT

Utilizing unpublished data derived from the Roosevelt Commission on Country Life (1908), national summary reports of a 12-item questionnaire were examined and compared with the commission's published report. For purposes of analysis, the 12 questions were grouped as: (1) economic concerns, (2) farm labor, (3) services, (4) quality of life, and (5) organization for change and social purposes. Responses were tabulated by region (North Central, North Atlantic, Western, South Atlantic, and South Central) and by occupation (farmers, farmer's wives, post office employees, bankers and real estate dealers, etc.). Tabulation of responses revealed that the majority were unqualifiedly dissatisfied with (1) organization for improvement and social purposes, (2) organization to promote buying and selling, (3) supply of farm labor, and (4) educational training for farm life. The majority were unqualifiedly satisfied with conditions of: (1) farm homes, (2) farm labor, (3) sanitation, (4) communication, and (5) credit. Occupational and regional differences were evident, as teachers proved critical of farm life and the southern regions reflected a comparative disadvantage. While five claims made by the commission were supported, it was found that some of the commission's most important conclusions did not parallel the questionnaire and were not supported by the tabulated data. (JC)

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A NATIONAL SURVEY OF OPINIONS ON COUNTRY LIFE IN AMERICA: THE UNPUBLISHED DATA FROM THE ROOSEVELT COMMISSION ON COUNTRY LIFE (1908)

by

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A National Survey of Opinions on Country Life in America:
The Unpublished Data from The Roosevelt
Commission on Country Life (1908)

The Report of President Theodore Roosevelt's Commission on Country Life (1909) is a document of lasting significance for the study of rural society in the United States. Dwight Sanderson, a rural sociologist at Cornell University, felt that the Commission's written legacy "probably had more influence on rural life in this country than any other document " and "should be required reading for every student of rural sociology and of rural life."[1] The findings and recommendations contained within the Report have long since assumed a prominent place in the study of rural life: however, a considerable mass of information collected by the Commission in the course of its inquiry never found its way into the final report and has remained virtually unused. This data, based on close to 100,000 responses to a circular devised by the Country Life Commission, affords modern researchers a rare opportunity to build upon and test the analysis of early 20th century rural life already available in the original Report.

President Roosevelt formally established the Commission on Country Life in August, 1908. The internationally-known horticulturist and agricultural expert, Liberty Hyde Bailey, then Director (Dean) of the New York State College of Agriculture at Cornell, was chosen to direct the Commission. An equally impressive group of individuals concerned with country life joined Bailey on the Commission: Henry Wallace, the popular midwestern editor of Wallace's Farmer; Kenyon L. Butterfield, Bailey's close friend and President

of the Massachusetts College of Agriculture; Walter Hines Page, the editor of World's Work and a representative of the Progressive South; C.S. Barrett, President of the Farmer's Union in Georgia; W.A. Beard, editor of the Great Western Magazine of Sacramento, California; and finally, Gifford Pinchot, United States Forest Service, the President's close advisor and advocate of the commission system for governmental problem-solving.[2] Once constituted, the commissioners set off at a vigorous pace to investigate the status of country life in the nation.

The members of the Country Life Commission employed a number of information-gathering techniques as they attempted to meet President Roosevelt's charge within the four-month period he had allowed them. The plan of investigation, largely formulated by Bailey, called for the following: (1) members of the commission conducted their own separate inquiries, each in his own specialty; (2) hearings were held at thirty locations about the country between November and the end of December; (3) President Roosevelt, upon the suggestion of commission members, issued a proclamation calling for all rural people to meet in district schoolhouses on December 5, 1908 to discuss their situation and transmit their findings; and (4) over 500,000 circulars dated October 1, 1908 containing twelve questions on aspects of country life were sent in the name of the Commission to persons at addresses supplied by the Department of Agriculture and other agencies and organizations. The questions also appeared in newspaper accounts, and the Commission urged those who had not received a circular to make their opinions known through correspondence. Butterfield and Wallace made up their own questions dealing with the rural church and farm labor.[3]

The final report of the Commission hardly reflected the potentially most revealing aspect of their plan of inquiry--the circulars. The extent to which responses to the circular questions found use is revealed by Bailey

himself in a letter to S.N.D. North, Director of the United States Census Bureau, sent in late January, 1909. In it, Bailey complained that he wished more time could have been spent digesting the information contained in the circulars, but "the time was too short" and the Commission felt "constrained to make our report as short as possible." As if in apology for the time and effort expended by the Census Bureau, he assured North that the tabulations furnished the Commission "were very interesting and we discussed them." Bailey had decided early in the Commission's existence that the circulars could not be properly tabulated and would yield only general summaries. He confided to Butterfield upon the refusal of Congress to expend $25,000 for the Commission to finish work on the collected material that the appropriation request had never appealed to him "because it seems to emphasize perhaps the very least important part of the work that the Commission has tried to do."[4]

A Census Bureau employee who worked on the responses had a quite different view of the circulars and their potential. Asked to assess the answers to returned circulars and suggest ways to utilize the mounting mass of material, Ernest Ingersoll of the Census Bureau found cause for optimism. "The mass of information contained in these answers," Ingersoll exulted, "is literally the voice of the people, speaking, as a whole, copiously, with simple sincerity and intelligent suggestiveness." He felt that a person "could hardly conceive of a more valuable collection of data in American farm and household economics." Of course, a major obstacle remained for Ingersoll and his colleagues no matter what benefits he could discern in the answers themselves--the information had yet to be reduced into a comprehensible form. If this task could be accomplished, and he had readied a plan of attack, Ingersoll thought the result "would be an invaluable encyclopedia of American sociology, which students could hardly afford to neglect, and which would be a permanent monument to the effective service

done by the Country Life Commission."[5]

The divergent viewpoints held by Bailey and Ingersoll regarding the value of the circulars would never be tested. Bailey allowed the circulars to fall into the hands of Secretary of Agriculture James Wilson, who had become antagonistic to the Commission's work and some of its membership. The Country Life Commission had operated independently from the Department of Agriculture, and it was no secret that Pinchot, Bailey, and Butterfield opposed Wilson's policies.[6] Throughout the Taft administration the circulars remained in the custody of the Department of Agriculture. Woodrow Wilson's new Secretary of Agriculture D.F. Houston had the circulars destroyed, as he considered them of no further value. One of those who advised the new Secretary in the matter in the Office of Experiment Stations, was E.W. Allen, who had originally helped formulate and distribute the circulars for Bailey and the Commission.[7]

Some of the circular responses and letters to the Commission in Bailey's personal files did escape destruction; more important, Ingersoll and others in the Census Bureau had made preliminary tabulations of close to 100,000 responses to the circular. These preliminary tabulations were the basis for 12 typed summary reports provided the Commission, one for each of the 12 "inquiries." All 12 reports have been preserved in the archives at Cornell University.* These surviving artifacts of the Country Life Commission's investigation represent the only survey of its type for this early period and, therefore, deserve closer scrutiny than the partial and almost incidental use made by historian Clayton S. Ellsworth.[8] Their existence also makes it possible to test the accuracy of the Commission's Report, which depended so much on the findings of its individual members.

The Questions in the Circular

The circular - a mail questionnaire in today's terms - was devised, as the accompanying instructions stated, to seek opinions and observations of farmers, teachers, ministers, businessmen and others on the condition of

country life. The 12 questions, referred to in the Census Bureau's reports as "inquiries", were as follows:[9]

I. Are the farm homes in your neighborhood as good as they should be under existing conditions?

II. Are the schools in your neighborhood training boys and girls satisfactorily for life on the farm?

III. Do the farmers in your neighborhood get the returns they reasonably should from the sale of their products?

IV. Do the farmers in your neighborhood receive from the railroads, highroads, trolley lines, etc., the services they reasonably should have?

V. Do the farmers in your neighborhood receive from the United States postal service, rural telephones, etc., the service they reasonably should expect?

VI. Are the farmers and their wives in your neighborhood satisfactorily organized to promote their mutual buying and selling interest?

VII. Are the renters of farms in your neighborhood making a satisfactory living?

VIII. Is the supply of farm labor in your neighborhood satisfactory?

IX. Are the conditions surrounding hired labor on the farms in your neighborhood satisfactory to the hired man?

X. Have the farmers in your neighborhood satisfactory facilities for doing their business in banking, credit, insurance, etc.?

XI. Are the sanitary conditions of farms in your neighborhood satisfactory?

XII. Do the farmers and their wives and families in your neighborhood get together for mutual improvement, entertainment and social intercourse as much as they should?

Each question had two untabulated sub-questions, (a) "Why?" and (b) "What suggestions have you to make?" A final open-ended question, "What, in your judgment, is the most important single thing to be done for the general betterment of country life?" apparently went untabulated before the circulars were destroyed.

The respondent identification requested included name, occupation, town or village, county and state.

A question on the rural church was omitted in deference to Wallace's wish.

The construction of the circulars left much to be desired from a modern point of view. Questions IV, V, and X were "double-barrelled", a shortcoming noted in the summaries prepared by the Census Bureau. Bailey recognized at the start that many respondents might not "have in mind exactly the same things" and worried about tabulating the questions. His fears were confirmed by North of the Census Bureau who, nevertheless, did little to improve the format and presentation.[10]

Despite the technical shortcomings, the replies were made "mostly with much care and with every evidence of good faith."[11]

The Sample

Some 555,000 circulars sent out for the Commission by the Department of Agriculture were aimed at a fairly diverse rural clientele (Appendix). Local newspapers also reprinted the questions and asked readers to send in their answers to the Commission.

The terms "farmer", "country" and "rural" were used loosely, even interchangeably, never defined, in the President's letter appointing the Commission and in the Commission's Report. This is understandable, considering the differences in the definition of "rural" which had been used by the U.S. Census from one census period to the next following the introduction of the concept in its official publications in 1874. Yet the Commission's field of inquiry was the conditions of the open country in the

sense used by Roosevelt in one of his letters to Bailey: ". . . where I use the word 'farmers' I mean also to include all those who live in the open country and are intimately connected with those who do the farm work--ministers, school teachers, physicians, editors of country papers, in short, all men and women whose life work is done either on the farm or in connection with the life work of those who are on the farm."[12] The mailing lists for the circulars corresponded to Roosevelt's meaning of "farmer."

When the Census Bureau began its tabulation in December, approximately 17 percent of the original distribution had been returned. These 94,303 circulars were the basis for the 12 unpublished summary reports from which it is possible to derive information about the distribution and characteristics of the respondents. Before the Commission prepared its Report, returns numbered about 115,000. The total number of returned circulars eventually held and later destroyed by the Department of Agriculture remains, of course, unknown.

The responses represented widespread geographic coverage of the nation. When the circulars came into the Census Bureau they were sorted into county of origin. Nearly all of the counties in the United States were represented, some by as many as 200 returns.[13] All 48 states and the District of Columbia were represented, although a complete count is not available of the number of returns for any state. In any case there was only partial reporting of the state tabulations. The accounting was most complete for Inquiry I. Some state information may also be gleaned from the reports for Inquiries II, III, IV, V and VII.

For all except Inquiries II and V, the state tabulations were grouped into five regions: North Atlantic, South Atlantic, North Central, South Central, and Western. The regional distribution of respondents may be constructed

from the unpublished report for Inquiry III as shown in Table 1.

If "farmer" as counted in the tabulations corresponded closely to farm operator, as used in the U.S. Census of 1910, then the North Atlantic and the Western regions were heavily over-represented in the return tabulated for farmers and the South Central region was under-represented to about the same degree. Over-representation was less extreme for the North Central region, as was under-representation for the South Atlantic region. For all responses, compared with the 1910 Census count of rural people, over-representation was most pronounced for the North Atlantic region, while under-representation was most marked for the South Central grouping.

On the basis of self-designation of occupation by the respondents, the Census Bureau classified the returns into 12 occupational categories which were used in reporting some of the results. Nearly three-fifths, 58 percent, of all who answered Inquiry III were farmers (Table 2). Only 1 percent were reported as farmers' wives. Post office employees were the second largest category of respondents, 12 percent. The occupational distribution of the respondents was quite similar among the five regions except for the post office employees, who ranged from 4 percent of the Western sample to 16 percent of the North Central sample.

It may be noted that no category was provided for hired farm workers. Perhaps they were included with "miscellaneous." Or were they placed with "farmers"?

Analysis of the Tabulations Reported for 94,303 Circulars

What were the opinions of country people of the United States about conditions in 1908 as indicated by answers to the 12 "inquiries"? How did opinions vary by occupation and by region? The analysis which follows is gleaned from the unpublished summaries. It is based on a reworking of the raw data for those inquiries when the summary reports make this possible. A national summary of the 94,303 returns is given for each of the 12 questions in Table 3. 10

Our analysis groups the inquiries into the following areas: (1) economic concerns (III and VI), (2) farm labor (VIII and IX), (3) services (II, IV, V and X), (4) quality of life (I, VII and XI) and (5) organization for change and social purposes.

Economic concerns

The responses in 1908 to Inquiry III, "Do the farmers in your neighborhood get the returns they reasonably should from the sale of their products?" hold special interest. It will be recalled that years later national agricultural policy was designed to re-establish the purchasing power which farmers had in 1909-14. Thus, the opinions reported here were expressed at the beginning of what, in retrospect, was judged by policy makers as a Golden Age in farm-nonfarm economic relations. The contemporary view was not so bright.

A bare majority, 52 percent, held without qualification that the returns locally to farmers were reasonable (Table 4). Farmers themselves and farmers' wives were least likely to give an unqualified "Yes" answer to Inquiry III, 43 and 46 percent, respectively. Only for farmers did unqualified "No" answers outnumber the unqualified "Yes" responses. Postal employees and editors and publishers were the two occupational groups having the most optimistic opinions about the returns received by farmers, with 74 and 71 percent, respectively, recorded in the "Yes" column. The opinions of school teachers, most of whom were undoubtedly conducting classes in one-teacher schools, were closest of all the occupational categories to the views of farmers and farmers' wives on this economic question.

The unpublished report permitted the construction of a table similar to Table 4 for each of the five regions. This revealed a wide range among the regions in the views held about the local farm economy. The most positive outlook for all occupations combined was held in the North Central and North Atlantic regions, the least positive was in the two southern regions. In the

South Central region only 33 percent of the answers were "Yes". In every region, farmers were less positive than the total regional sample. In only the North Central and North Atlantic regions did the "Yes" answers by farmers outnumber their "No" answers.

The regional unqualified "Yes" answers for all occupations and for farmers were as follows:

Region	All occupations	Farmers
	- - - - - - percent - - - - - -	
North Central	65	54
North Atlantic	56	46
Western	46	40
South Atlantic	40	34
South Central	33	25

In four regions out of five, farmers' wives were the closest match to the farmers' "Yes" answer. Except for the wives, in three regions the school teachers were closest to agreement with the farmers in their degree of positive outlook; in the other two, teachers were second to the clergy in this respec

A rosy view as to the farmers' returns was held most frequently by postal employees in two regions, by editors and publishers in one, by merchants and manufacturers in one, and in one / the postal employees and the editors were equally optimistic.

"No" responses outnumbered or equalled the "Yes" answers in 6 of the 12 occupational categories in the South Central region, in 4 in the South Atlantic, in 1 in the Western region and in none in the two northern regions.

Inquiry VI, "Are the farmers and their wives in your neighborhood satisfactorily organized to promote their mutual buying and selling interest?" yielded far more agreement among the occupational groupings than did Inquiry III. Nearly three-fourths, 72 percent, of the total answered with an unquali-

fied "No", and the majority of every occupational group saw the need for organization among farmers for buying and selling. Occupational differences, however, followed roughly the general pattern displayed on the first economic question. At one extreme, 78 percent of the farmers saw a lack of buying and selling organization; at the other extreme, post office employees and merchants and manufacturers each had 33 percent of their number who thought existing arrangements were satisfactory. Teachers held opinions almost identical with those of farmers; the clergy, lawyers and judges, and farmers' wives also held opinions not greatly different from those expressed by the farmers.

Our regional data are restricted to farmers and teachers. Only the ratio of noes to yeas may be found in the unpublished report. On the basis of the ratios, the regions may be arranged from most to least satisfied with the organized efforts for buying and selling as follows:

For Farmers	For Teachers
North Atlantic	Western
Western	North Atlantic
North Central	North Central
South Central	South Central
South Atlantic	South Atlantic

The summarizer of Inquiry VI explained the lower ratio of noes in the West to "the live organization of the fruit growers in certain Western states". He supposed that the North Atlantic farmers were not fully awake to the need for organization in the handling of their milk products. But the preponderance of "No" answers by farmers, nationwide, suggested that the need for business organization among farmers for buying and selling had "plainly begun to be forced home" upon them and their thinking "will in time give rise to such organization as will advance the interests of the rural population."

Farm labor

Inquiry VIII, employer-oriented, asked "Is the supply of farm labor in your neighborhood satisfactory?" Inquiry IX, worker-oriented, inquired "Are the conditions surrounding hired labor on the farms in your neighborhood satisfactory to the hired man?"

The overall conclusion from Inquiry VIII was that the "supply was, for the country as a whole and for most sections thereof, very far from satisfactory." Such was the view of 60 percent of the respondents. The majority of every occupational group, with one exception, concurred with the view that the supply of farm labor was not satisfactory. The one exception was the postal workers, of whom only 48 percent agreed with the majority position. Farmers, on this issue so closely identified with their economic self-interest, occupied a midway position among the occupational groups. Most convinced that the farm labor supply was inadequate were the clery, the teachers, and lawyers and judges, with 69, 66 and 66 percent, respectively. By a narrow margin, more farmers' wives than farmers felt the supply unsatisfactory, 64 versus 62 percent.

Regionally, based on the ratio of noes to yeas - the only measure reported - the range from most to least satisfactory labor supply for the total sample and for farmers was as follows:

Western

South Central

North Central

North Atlantic

South Atlantic

The original analyst noted that the results indicated the supply of labor to be "least satisfactory along the Atlantic seabord, where the great body of immigrants land." With the Western, and especially the Pacific coast,

states indicating they were in the most satisfactory situation of all areas, the analyst could only interpret the clamor for the restoration of Chinese labor as being "the cry of a limited number of large land owners who are unwilling that their section shall have the benefit of the independent labor that has been the main support of the agriculture industry of the North Atlantic and North Central states".

The opinions as to whether the conditions were satisfactory to the hired man were in many ways the converse of the answers as to the supply. Better than three out of five, 63 percent, of the total sample and of farmers held the conditions to be satisfactory. The majority of all occupational groupings except the teachers concurred in this favorable appraisal of the hired man's condition. Some 36 percent of the teachers gave an unqualified "No" answer to Inquiry IX and, typically, postal employees had the most rosy outlook of what hired men thought about their conditions, with 70 percent answering the question affirmatively. There is no way now of discovering what hired men in the sample may have said. Farmers' wives, although holding opinions generally similar to farmers, had the largest percentage of any category with indefinite or qualified answers, 17 percent.

The regional view, based on the yes-no ratios for all occupations combined, gave an array from most to least satisfactory conditions for hired men as follows:

North Central

North Atlantic

Western

South Atlantic

South Central

Farmers' opinions were ordered in the same way except for a tie for the South Atlantic and South Central grouping.

Services

Dissatisfaction with the training provided by rural schools for life on the farm was predominant as judged by the 57 percent "No" vote on Inquiry II. Farmer dissatisfaction (60 percent) was exceeded only by that of the teachers (69 percent) and was matched by that of the clergy. Every occupational group supported the prevailing opinion except for the postal employees, of whom 44 percent said without qualification that the schools in the neighborhood were training boys and girls satisfactorily for life on the farm. Farmers' wives gave about the same low positive opinion as the farmers about the training offered, but also had one of the largest percentages, 17, of indefinite and qualified answers.

Responses to this question were said to be quite uniform across the nation; every state (save one possible exception judged to be a tabulating error) returned an excess of "No" over "Yes" votes on the training available for farm life. No regional data were given.

The double-barrelled nature of the other three questions on services is regrettable, but does not prevent teasing out some meaning from the replies.

Better than three-fourths of all in the sample thought farmers in their neighborhoods received from the United States postal service, rural telephones, etc., the service they reasonably should expect. All occupations were in general agreement with this assessment, with the "Yes" answers ranging from the low of 73 percent for farmers to the high of 84 percent for those who were rural free delivery carriers and other postal employees. The strongest voice of dissatisfaction was that of the farmers, of whom 17 percent answered Inquiry V in the negative; "Undoubtedly they were the ones whose feet the shoe of poor and insufficient service pinched the hardest, and they hoped for improvements far more than others saw any necessity for." Next in dissent were the teach-

ers, 13 percent saying "No" to the question.

For all the states, the answers of the total sample were reported to consist largely of "Yeas". There are no regional data.

Responses to Query IV, "Do the farmers in your neighborhood receive from the railroads, highroads, trolley lines, etc., the services they reasonably should have?" could give only a measure of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with transportation facilities generally. The unpublished summary did not include any raw data.

"Yes" answers outnumbered "No" answers for the total sample in all regions but the West. The other four regions in ascending order of satisfaction on the basis of the yes-no ratios were South Central, South Atlantic, North Atlantic, and North Central. In the 15 states, nearly all in the West, in which the majority were dissatisfied with the transportation services, farmers were the only group to have the majority dissatisfied in every one of the 15. The teachers, again, most closely resembled farmers in their opinions; the majority of the teachers registered more "No" than "Yes" responses in 13 of the 15 states.

The analyst for the unpublished report concluded that farmers and others dissatisfied with farm prices of farm products evidently did not hold the railroads prinicipally responsible for the low prices, except possibly in the Western states.

Query X,"Have the farmers in your neighborhood satisfactory facilities for doing their business in banking, credit, insurance, etc?" drew a larger and more consistent favorable response than any other question. Some 85 percent of the entire sample and 83 percent of the farmers were reported as giving an unqualified "Yes" answer. Clearly, there was little dissatisfaction with financial services. Only 11 percent of the farmers and 12 percent of the teachers gave a "No" answer. The 90 percent of the bankers and real estate dealers who found nothing wanting in financial services for farmers were

joined by an equal percentage of the editors and publishers.

Quality of life

The lead-off question in the circular, "Are the farm homes in your neighborhood as good as they should be under existing conditions?" might be interpreted as being an indicator of the quality of life in farm homes. Nationally, responses were divided much as in the case of Inquiry III on the returns to farmers from their sales; 55 percent gave an unqualified "Yes" answer, 34 percent gave an unqualified "No" answer. Regional and state variations were evident, but neither raw data nor percentages were included in the summary made for the Commission.

In the North Atlantic and North Central regions and in the majority of the western states (New Mexico and Arizona being the exceptions) preponderant opinion was that farm homes were as good as they should be. In contrast, in the South Central region and for most of the South Atlantic states (Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia being the exceptions) the prevailing opinion was that the farm homes were less desirable than could be expected. In 14 states the majority of the total sample took a dim view of the status of farm homes, a view concurred in by the majority of farmers and of school teachers in all 14. The states were West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico and Arizona. The writer of the unpublished summary seemed to say that the negative appraisal of the conditions of farm homes in the South Central and South Atlantic states might have been even more strongly negative if the term "farm" had been defined in the question. The reasoning was that in those two regions "the word 'farmer' is quite generally used only in referring to the land owner, or to a cash tenant; and hence, the men who answer the inquiries are likely to include in their vision but a limited number of the homes of those employed on the farm as croppers, or other share tenants."

In the 34 states in which the majority view was that farm homes were as good as could be expected, the writer of the unpublished summary noted that the number of yeas, compared with no s, was greatest from the rural free delivery carriers and postmasters. Their view of farm homes and other conditions of country life were looked at, thought the Census analyst, "from the position of the most self-satisfied government employees who, because they are fairly well satisfied with themselves and their position, look at the lives and surroundings of other[s] through rose colored glasses."

In the same 34 states, the ratio of "Yes" returns was smallest for school teachers. In New York, teachers were the only class of respondents to express a majority opinion that the farm homes of the state were unsatisfactory. The interpretation given by the Census summarizer was that the school teachers "are mostly young people, fresh from the school, and look at all things through the idealism of the student and of the young, and because they are looking and working for something better than they now have for themselves, and are also working and hoping that the world may share in the better day and better conditions, see more imperfections in farm nomes than [do] any other class."

The summary of Inquiry VII, "Are the renters of farms in your neighborhood making a satisfactory living?" also included a caution, noting that the term "renter" had different meanings from one section of the nation to another. Thus, in parts of the country, "renter" was said to signify one who paid a cash rental for the use of a farm, and in those sections the one who worked for a share of the products was known as a "cropper", one who "works on shares". Thus, it was suggested, in such localities the responses might well be in reference to renters as defined in the local vernacular rather than in the more inclusive sense. A further warning was that the answers of the farmers and farmers' wives might be more favorable than the circumstances warrant, to the extent that landlords might be over-represented among the

respondents.

With these precautions in mind, the answers to Inquiry VII were presented for only two broad regional groupings, (a) the South and (b) the remainder of the United States (Table 5). The contrast between the two was sharp. In the two Southern regions a slight majority, 51 percent, of the total sample unqualifiedly said renters were not making a satisfactory living. In the rest of the country, a stronger majority, 59 percent, thought that renters' living was satisfactory.

Farmers and their wives and school teachers in both areas were less convinced than the other occupations as a group that renters were well off.

Respondents to Inquiry XI, "Are the sanitary conditions of farms in your neighborhood satisfactory?"were left to set their own definition of "sanitary conditions" and own criteria for "satisfactory". At the time, it may be recalled, the first local public health department was yet to be established. In fact, a by-product of the Commission's activities was the instigation of local public health agencies to serve rural areas.

Two-thirds of all in the sample and even more farmers, 69 percent, held the opinion that sanitary conditions of farms were satisfactory. Most likely to dissent from the prevailing view were teachers and physicians, of whom 44 and 49 percent, respectively, agreed with the majority. The spread between farmers and their wives was greater on this than on any other question; however, 55 percent of the small number of wives identified as respondents agreed that sanitary conditions were satisfactory.

Regionally, the array from most to least favorable, based on the yes-no ratios, was:

North Central

North Atlantic

South Atlantic

Western

South Central

Organization for Change and Social Purposes

The lack of organizations in the countryside for improvement and social and recreational purposes was widely felt, as indicated by the answers to Inquiry XII, "Do the farmers and their wives and families in your neighborhood get together for mutual improvement, entertainment and social intercourse as much as they should?"

The opinions as to this shortcoming of country living were even more pronounced than those about the failure of the schools to train for life on the farm. Some 65 percent of all who answered, 69 percent of the farmers, 58 percent of the wives, and 71 percent of the teachers gave unqualified "No" answers to the question. Every occupational category had a majority in agreement on this assessment. The postal employees mustered the highest proportion, 36 percent, saying the situation was satisfactory.

Regions were arrayed from most to least satisfactory as follows, for the total sample and for farmers:

North Atlantic

North Central and Western (tied)

South Atlantic

South Central

Summary and Conclusions

A thorough analysis of the nationwide mail survey of opinions about conditions of farm life and country neighborhoods in 1908 was prevented by the short time period in which the Country Life Commission had to operate, the seeming indifference of Bailey to these circulars, and the political infighting which brought about their destruction. Nevertheless, from the records which have remained largely unused in the archives, it is possible to reconstruct a broad view of the prevailing opinions held about some questions which must have been rated as important by those who had them distributed to over 550,000 persons in every county of the nation. This broad view seems valid regardless of any misgivings about the representativeness of the nearly 95,000 responses and despite some evident weaknesses in the question wording.

Leaving aside Inquiry IV about transportation services, for lack of quantitative data, and Inquiry VII about the living of farm renters because of the great South-other differential in the responses, we conclude that the majority of all respondents and of farmers as well were unqualifiedly dissatisfied with the following, listed in order starting with the area of largest percentage dissatisfied:

VI. Organized to promote buying and selling (Economic concerns)

XII. Opportunity to get together for mutual improvement, entertainment and social intercourse (Organization for improvement and social purposes)

VIII. Supply of farm labor (Farm labor)

II. Training offered by schools for life on the farm (Services)

The majority of the total sample but a minority of the farmers were unqualifiedly satisfied with:

III. Reasonable returns from farm sales (Economic concerns)

The majority of the total sample and of the farmers were unqualifiedly satisfied with the following, with the items listed in increasing order of satisfaction:

I. Condition of farm homes (no national data for farmers) (Quality of life)

IX. Conditions for hired men on farms (Farm labor)

XI. Sanitary conditions on farms (Quality of life)

V. Communication services (Services)

X. Credit institutions (Services)

The influence of occupational roles on opinions was clear, with the amount of spread and degree of consensus or disagreement varying from issue to issue. The spread and lack of agreement were greatest on the economic issue of returns to farmers (a spread of 27 points in "No" answers). The second economic concern, organization for buying and selling, also resulted in a spread of more than 20 points. But so did Inquiry XI on sanitary conditions, Inquiry II on training offered by the schools, and Inquiry VIII on the supply of farm labor.

Postal employees quite consistently saw country life conditions in the best light. Editors and business-related respondents also tended to have more favorable views than did the other occupational groupings. School teachers were more critical and, by implication, more oriented for change and improvement than other non-farmer categories, and on some issues more so than farmers themselves.

Regional differentiation was evident in the responses, with opinions in the two southern regions reflecting the comparative disadvantage which has long been familiar.

The tabulated answers from the circular responses bolstered the claims made in the Country Life Commission Report that (1) agriculture did not yield enough of a profit for the majority of American farmers, (2) rural society needed more organizations for buying and selling, (3) social conditions fell far short of possibilities, (4) insufficient training in the skills of country life plagued rural education, and (5) the supply of farm labor was insufficient for the demand. Some of the most important conclusions drawn by the Commission, however, did not parallel the questions asked in the circulars, nor were they complemented by the tabulated data.

The large emphasis placed on the problems of monopolization in rural life--rivers, forests, land--resulted from evidence gathered outside the mail survey and from personal opinions of the individual commissioners. Participants in the survey were not asked a specific question on the problem of monopolies; nor were they queried concerning such factors as soil depletion or the general lot of farm women.

In the matters of sanitation and access to credit facilities, the tabulated answers appeared to contradict the Commission's published findings.

The Country Life Commission's energetic investigation of rural conditions in the United States and its written report became the basis for much of what followed in attempts to study and redevelop rural areas. On many counts, the opinions of those most closely associated with country life indicate support for the recommendations made by the Commission; many were ready for the public policy and institutional changes initiated on their behalf or by themselves in the decade to follow. The importance of the Commission's Report is unquestionable. Nevertheless, a more concerted

attempt to integrate data contained in the circular responses would have made the Report an even more powerful and compelling document for students of rural life.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Dwight Sanderson, Rural Sociology and Rural Social Organization (New York, 1942), 711-12.

[2]Andrew Denny Rogers III, Liberty Hyde Bailey: A Story of American Plant Sciences (Princeton, 1949); Olaf F. Larson, "Liberty Hyde Bailey's Impact on Rural Life," Baileya, VI (March, 1958), 10-21; Liberty Hyde Bailey, The State and the Farmer (Ithaca Journal, reprint, no date), 28. For an excellent description of the background leading up to the appointment of Bailey and the Commission's work, see Clayton S. Ellsworth, "Theodore Roosevelt's Country Life Commission," Agricultural History, XXXIV (October, 1960), 155-72.

Dr. Charles W. Styles served as a medical advisor to the Commission, and Norval W. Kemp became its secretary.

[3]Report of the Country Life Commission (1909), first published as Senate Document No. 705, 60th Congress, 2nd Session, 22-28. The Report was reprinted soon thereafter by the Spokane Chamber of Commerce for use in the Northwest, then published by Sturgis & Walton (1911) and reprinted twice (1911 and 1917), and later reprinted again by the University of North Carolina Press (1944). See p. 26 of the Report (pp. 51-53 of the 1944 reprint) for the list of twelve questions. Copies of the circulars are in Additional Bailey Papers, Box 3, Department of Manuscripts and University Archives, Cornell University; Bailey to Roosevelt (copy), December 2, 1908; Wallace to Bailey, October 13, 1908; copies of Wallace and Butterfield circulars, ibid.

[4]Bailey to Dr. S. N. D. North, January 25, 1909; Bailey to Butterfield, October 26, 1908; Bailey to James Wilson, January 16, 1909; ibid., Box 3, 4.

When President Roosevelt submitted the Report to Congress on February 9, 1909, he asked for an appropriation of $25,000 "to enable the commission to

digest . . . and to collect and to digest much more that is within its reach, and thus complete its work." Fed up with Roosevelt's use of the commission system for reform, the House of Representatives rejected the request. Report of the Country Life Commission, Congressional Record, 60th Congress, 2nd Session, 3660-3664.

[5]Ernest Ingersoll to Bailey, "Report upon Answers to Circulars with Suggestions for Utilizing the Information," December 21, 1908, Additional Bailey Papers, Box 3.

[6]Bailey to Wilson, ibid., Ellsworth, "Country Life Commission," 169-70, fn. 77, 78, 79, 80.

[7]Charles J. Brand to R. M. Reese, September 9, 1915; E. W. Allen to R. M. Reese, September 9, 1915; Special Order of D. F. Houston to R. M. Reese, September 23, 1915; MSS. Record Group 16, USDA, National Archives, as cited in Ellsworth, "Country Life Commission," 170, fn. 81. Allen to Bailey, October 23, 1908, November 5, 1908, Additional Bailey Papers, Box 3.

[8]Ellsworth, "Country Life Commission."

[9]Report (1944 reprint), 51-53.

[10]Bailey to Pinchot, September 26, 1908; Pinchot to Bailey, September 28, 1908; Bailey to Pinchot, September 30, 1908; Additional Bailey Papers, Box 3.

[11]Report (1944 reprint), 54.

[12]Ibid., 52-53.

[13]Ingersoll to Bailey, "Report upon Answers to Circulars," December 21, 1908, Additional Bailey Papers, Box 3.

*Arrangements have been made by the New York State College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell, with funds provided by the Estate of Louis J. Taber Grant, to publish the set of reports in one volume.

Appendix

Distribution of Circulars[1]

12,000	Agricultural Colleges and experiment station men, Farmer's Institute workers, teachers and others interested in agricultural schools, county superintendents of schools, etc.
82,000	Agents, correspondents, aids, of Bureau of Statistics and Department of Agriculture.
115,000	Department of Agriculture lists of farmers, tobacco growers, fruit growers, nurserymen, corn growers, arid farmers, irrigators, milk producers, stock breeders, bee keepers, veterinarians, agricultural engineers, creameries, cheese factories, etc.
5,000	Employees of United States Department of Agriculture, and circulars distributed at the request of Bureaus.
25,000	Grange list
22,000	State Agriculture officials, officers and members of boards of agriculture, of various agricultural and horticultural associations, fair associations, farmers clubs, etc.
5,500	Women's Clubs
2,500	American Civic Association, including Village improvement societies.
300	Y.M.C.A., town and county branches.
2,500	Railroad officials

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[1] E. W. Allen, Assistant Director, Office of Experiment Stations, to Liberty Hyde Bailey, October 23, 1908, in Additional Bailey Papers, Box 3, Department of Manuscripts and University Archives, Cornell University.

20,000	Newspapers
40,000	Post office rural delivery carriers.
50,000	Country ministers and physicians reached through postmasters
173,000	Lists furnished by Agricultural experiment stations.

Table 1. Distribution by region of circulars having response to Inquiry III

Region	All responses		Farmer responses	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
North Atlantic	17,111	19.0	9,577	18.0
North Central	37,312	41.4	21,382	40.1
Western	7,692	8.5	4,700	8.8
South Atlantic	12,613	14.0	7,496	14.1
South Central	15,443	17.1	10,130	19.0
Total	90,171	100.0	53,285	100.0

Note: The percentage of farm operators reported by the 1910 U.S. Census as located in each of the regions was 10.3, 35.1, 5.9, 17.5 and 31.2, respectively. The corresponding percentages for the rural population were 13.5, 33.2, 7.1, 18.4 and 27.7.

Table 2. Distribution by occupation of respondents to Inquiry III: United States and Regions

Occupation	United States	Region				
		North Central	North Atlantic	Western	South Atlantic	South Central
		Percent				
Farmers	58	57	55	61	61	64
Farmers' wives	1	1	2	1	a/	1
Post Office employees	12	16	9	4	12	7
Bankers and real estate dealers	3	3	3	5	2	3
Editors and publishers	3	3	2	3	1	2
Merchants and manufacturers	6	5	8	5	7	6
School teachers	4	3	4	6	4	4
Physicians	4	4	4	4	4	4
Clergymen	3	3	4	3	3	3
Lawyers and judges	2	1	2	2	2	2
Miscellaneous	2	2	4	4	2	2
Not stated	2	2	3	2	2	2
All occupations	100	100	100	100	100	100

a/ Less than 1%

Table 3. Summary of preliminary tabulation of 94,303 circulars

Inquiry	Total with response	Response					No response
		Yes	Qualified Yes	No	Qualified No	"Indefinite"	
				Number			
I	90,024	49,208	4,969	30,784	2,146	2,917	4,279
II	90,221	28,269	4,245	51,806	2,538	3,363	4,082
III	90,171	47,467	5,092	33,078	1,917	2,617	4,132
IV	numbers not given						
V	91,104	68,990	6,161	12,727	966	2,170	3,199
VI	87,623	17,808	2,859	63,469	1,101	2,386	6,680
VII	85,961	45,383	4,219	25,485	1,658	9,216	8,342
VIII	90,244	28,269	3,871	54,062	2,125	1,917	4,059
IX	85,926	53,789	3,165	22,196	2,018	4,758	8,377
X	89,521	75,906	2,362	8,909	643	1,701	4,782
XI	86,638	56,893	4,592	20,234	2,457	2,462	7,665
XII	87,676	23,711	2,805	56,847	1,666	2,647	6,627

Table 4. Responses to Inquiry III classified by occupation of respondent: All regions

Occupation	Total	Response				
		Yes	Qualified Yes	No	Qualified No	"Indefinite"
		Percent				
All occupations	100	52	6	37	2	3
Farmers	100	43	6	46	2	3
Farmers' wives	100	46	7	38	3	6
Post office employees	100	74	4	19	1	2
Bankers and real estate dealers	100	66	6	24	2	2
Editors and publishers	100	71	4	22	1	2
Merchants and manufacturers	100	68	4	23	2	3
School teachers	100	52	5	36	3	4
Physicians	100	67	4	26	1	2
Clergymen	100	64	5	25	3	3
Lawyers and judges	100	59	7	30	2	2
Miscellaneous	100	65	4	28	1	2
Not stated	100	58	5	32	2	3

Table 5. Responses to Inquiry VII, by broad occupational and regional groupings

Region and Occupation	Response					
	Total	Yes	Qualified Yes	No	Qualified No	"Indefinite"
	- - - - - - - - - - - - percent - - - - - - - - - - - -					
South Atlantic & South Central Regions	100	35	5	51	2	7
Farmers & farmers' wives	100	32	5	55	2	7
School teachers	100	30	9	53	3	6
All other	100	41	5	45	2	7
North Atlantic, North Central, & Western Regions	100	59	5	22	2	12
Farmers & farmers' wives	100	58	5	23	2	13
School teachers	100	53	4	26	3	14
All other	100	63	5	20	2	11